

LOUISE GORENFLO: Good morning. My name is Louise Gorenflo, the Director of Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light, a statewide network, a faith group, that spiritually responds to the moral challenges of climate change. We applaud the suspension of new federal lands coal leasing so that the Department of Interior can consider how coal leasing affects public health and climate and how to ensure a fair return to the public for use of public resources. The American energy intensive lifestyle causes climate change. The increasing weather extremes of unabated climate change transforms natural systems to the great detriment of many life forms, including our own. The elderly, children, communities of color, and lower income people, those least responsible for climate change, are disproportionately harmed by the impacts of climate change and our persistent inaction. Climate change is a moral issue, the core principal being that we should not harm others for our self-benefit. Our national moral response to climate change turns on our willingness to reduce our carbon pollution even if we must change how we produce and use our energy. Nearly all faith communities believe that we have special responsibilities to care for creation and protect the sanctity of the natural world. What are we willing to fulfill our sacred duty? Americans understand that burning fossil fuels cause climate change, yet we do not act on the urgency of that knowledge. We behave like smokers, unwilling to stop smoking even though we know we create misery for ourselves and loved ones. Michael Greenstone, the Milton Friedman, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, had found that the climate damages from coal mines from the Powder River Basin are five to six times greater than its market value. The actual return the public receives from the extraction and combustion of coal from public resources is ever greater suffering. A study published in nature in 2015 concluded that the U.S. needs to keep ninety-two percent of its coal reserves in the ground as part of an overall slashing of fossil fuel use if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Because forty percent of coal burned in U.S. power plants come from federal public lands, the decision of the federal government to ban further coal extraction from public lands will have a major impact on improving our well-being. Those who understand the dire situation we have put ourselves into through the extraction and burning of fossil fuels know that the only moral choice we have is to keep the coal in the ground. Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light urges the Department of Interior to keep the coal in the ground on federal lands. We must act what we know to be true. Thank you.